

London Lamps

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Thomas Burke



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London Lamps

A Book of Songs

By the Same Author

Limehouse Nights :
Tales of Chinatown

Twinkletoes :
A Tale of Chinatown

Nights in Town :
A London Autobiography

London Lamps

A Book of Songs

By

Thomas Burke

Author of "Limehouse Nights"



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LOS ANGELES

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A few of these verses appeared as chapter-headings in the author's book on London, published a year or so ago. They are here reprinted by kind permission of Messrs George Allen & Unwin Ltd., the publishers of that book.

T. B.

CITY DUSK

*THE day dies in a wrath of cloud,
Flecking her roofs with pallid rain,
And dies its music, harsh and loud,
Struck from the tiresome strings of pain.*

*Her highways leap to festal bloom,
And swallow-swift the traffic skims
O'er sudden shoals of light and gloom,
Made lovelier where the distance dims.*

*Robed by her tiring-maid, the dusk,
The town lies in a silvered bower,
As, from a miserable husk,
The lily robes herself with flower.*

*And all her tangled streets are gay,
And all her rudenesses are gone ;
For, howso pitiless the day,
The evening brings delight alone.*

A SUBURBAN NIGHT

*O*H, sweetly sad and sadly sweet,
That rain-pearled night at Highbury !
The picture theatre, off the street,
That housed us from the lisp'ing sleet,
Is a white grave of dreams for me.

Though smile and talk were all our part,
Sorrow lay prone upon your heart
That never again our lips might meet,
And never so softly fall the sleet
In gay-lamped, lyric Highbury.
Love made your lily face to shine,
But oh, your cheek was salt to mine,
As we walked home from Highbury !

O starry street of shop and show,
And was it thus long years ago ?
Was the full tale but waste and woe,
And Love but doom in Highbury,
My dusty, dreaming Highbury ?

PICCADILLY

*QUEEN of all streets, you stand alway
Lovely by dusk or dark or day.
Cruellest of streets that I do know,
I love you wheresoe'er I go.*

*The daytime knows your lyric wonder :
Your tunes that rhyme and chime and thunder,
And exiles vision with delight
Your million-blossomed charm of night.*

*Sweet frivolous frock and fragrant face
Your shadow-fretted pavements trace ;
And all about your haunted mile
Hangs a soft air, a girlish smile.*

*But other steps make echo here,
With curse and prayer and wasted tear ;
And under the silver wings of sleep
Your desolate step-children creep.*

*Street of all fair streets fairest—say
Why thus we love you night and day ;
And why we love you last and best
Whose hearts were broken on your breast !*

OLD COMPTON STREET

THROUGH London rain her people flow,
And Pleasure trafficks to and fro.
A gemmy splendour fills the town,
And robes her in a spangled gown
Through which no sorry wound may show.

*But with the dusk my fancies go
To that grey street I used to know,
Where Love once brought his heavy crown
Through London rain.*

*And ever, when the day is low,
And stealthy clouds the night forethrow,
I quest these ways of dear renown,
And pray, while Hope in tears I drown,
That once again her face may glow
Through London rain !*

IN MARYBONE

*THE cold moon lights our attic stair,
In Marybone, in Marybone !
And windows float in lyric air,
In Marybone, in Marybone !
O derelict day ! O barren night !
O phantoms of a dream's delight,
You midnight hours in Marybone !*

*The high gods hold festivities,
In Marybone, in Marybone !
We have ransacked the golden years
Of all their fruit of joy and tears,
Gathered their burden to our mind,
In Marybone, in Marybone !
But O lost love, for one warm kiss
To break the weeping of the wind
That beats about this Marybone,
This damned deflowered Marybone !*

AT LIMEHOUSE

YELLOW man, yellow man, where have you
been ?

*Down the Pacific, where wonders are seen.
Up the Pacific, so glamorous and gay,
Where night is of blue, and of silver the day.*

*Yellow man, yellow man, what did you there ?
I loved twenty maids who were loving and fair.
Their cheeks were of velvet, their kisses were fire,
I looked at them boldly and had my desire.*

*Yellow man, yellow man, what do you know ?
That living is lovely wherever I go ;
And lovelier, I say, since when soft winds have passed,
The tides will race over my bosom at last.*

*Yellow man, yellow man, why do you sigh ?
For flowers that are sweet, and for flowers that die.
For days in fair waters and nights in strange lands,
For faces forgotten and little lost hands.*

AT SHADWELL

*HE was a bad, glad sailor-man,
Tan-ta-ta-ran-tan-tare-o !*

*You never could find a haler man,
Tan-ta-ta-ran-tan-tare !*

*All human wickedness he knew,
From Millwall Docks to Pi-chi-lu ;
He loved all things that make us gay,
He'd spit his juice ten yards away.*

And roundly he'd declare—oh !

*“ It isn't so much that I want the beer
As the bloody good company,*

Whow !

Bloody good company ! ”

*He loved all creatures—black, brown, white,
Tan-ta-ta-ran-tan-tare-o !*

And never a word he'd speak in spite,

Tan-ta-ta-ran-tan-tare !

*He knew that we were mortal men
Who sinned and laughed and sinned again ;
And never a cruel thing he'd do
At Millwall Docks or Pi-chi-lu ;*

If you were down he'd make you gay :

He'd spit his juice ten yards away,

And roundly he'd declare—oh !

*“ It isn't so much that I want yer beer
As yer bloody good company,*

Whow !

Bloody good company ! ”

WEST INDIA DOCK ROAD

*BLACK man — white man — brown man —
yellow man—*

*All the lousy Orient loafing on the quay :
Hindoo, Dago, Jap, Malay, and Chinaman
Dipping into London from the great green sea !*

*Black man — white man — brown man — yellow
man—*

*Pennyfields and Poplar and Chinatown for me !
Stately moving cut-throats and many-coloured
mysteries,
Never were such lusty things for London lads to see !*

*On the evil twilight—rose and star and silver—
Steals a song that long ago in Singapore they sang :
Fragrant of spices, of incense and opium,
Cinnamon and aconite, the betel and the bhang.*

*Three miles straight lies lily-clad Belgravia,
Thin-lipped ladies and padded men and pale.
But here are turbaned princes and velvet-glancing
gentlemen,
Tom-tom and sharp knife and salt-caked sail.*

*Then get you down to Limehouse, by rigging, wharf,
and smoke-stack,
Glamour, dirt, and perfume, and dusky men and
gold ;
For down in lurking Limehouse there's the blue moon
of the Orient—
Lamps for young Aladdins, and bowies for the bold !*

SUNDAY TEA-TIME

*T*HERE is a noise of winkles on the air.
Muffins and winkles rattle down the road,
The sluggish road, whose hundred houses stare
One on another in after-dinner gloom.
“Peace, perfect Peace!” wails an accordion;
“Ginger, you’re barmy!” snarls a gramophone.

*A most unhappy place, this leafless Grove
In the near suburbs; not a place for tears,
Nor for light laughter, for all life is chilled
With the unpurposed toil of many years.
But once—ah, once!—the accordion’s wheezy strains
Led my poor heart to April-smelling lanes.*

CLAPHAM, S.W.

ALL wild it lay not long ago,
In billowing curve and dip.
Where houses brood the sweet hedgerow
Of hawthorn bush was seen ;
And the white road was used to slip
Through golden hills and green.

A cottage, pinafores with rose,
Knelt under Balham Hill,
And where the tiresome traffic flows
Were many lily lanes
Echoing the thrush's raptured trill
To April's jewelling rains.

And still, though wire and petrol rage,
And many chimneys loom ;
And surly smokes their struggles wage,
Over the grey bricks blowing—
Her streets, for me, are all abloom
With flowers of childhood's growing.

PADDINGTON

*DEEP in a dusk of lilac the station lies,
Vasty and echo-haunted and fiercely made ;
Speared all about with suns where the arches rise,
Leaping on lusty limbs over pools of shade.
Oh, lovely are her lean lines, and lovely her poise,
Empanoplying the long, dim frenzy of noise.*

*But her most beauty she holds until the night,
Even as Love, until the brute day be ended,
When all her thousand eyes in a tempest of light
Shatter the cathedral gloom, and show her splendid.
Splendid we know her, and ever splendid she stands ;
Clean from the splendid sweat of human hands.*

CLERKENWELL

*DEEP in the town a window smiles—
You shall not find it, though you seek ;
But over many bricky miles
It draws me through the wearing week.
Its panes are dim, its curtains grey,
It shows no heartsome shine at dusk ;
For gas is dear, and factory pay
Makes small display :
On the small wage she earns she dare not be too gay !*

*A loud saloon flings golden light
Athwart the wet and greasy way,
Where, every happy Sunday night,
We meet in mood of holiday.
She wears a dress of claret glow
That's thinly frothed with bead and lace.
She buys this lace in Jasmine Row,
A spot, you know,
Where luxuries of lace for a mere nothing go.*

*I love the shops that flare and lurk
In the big street whose lamps are gems,
For there she stops when off to work
To covet silks and diadems.
At evenings, too, the organ plays
" My Hero " or " In Dixie Land " ;
And in the odoured purple haze,
Where naphthas blaze,
The grubby little girls the dust of dancing raise.*

STEPNEY CAUSEWAY

*B*EYOND the pleading lip, the reaching hand,
 Laughter and tear ;
Beyond the grief that none would understand ;
 Beyond all fear ;
Dreams ended, beauty broken,
Deeds done, and last word spoken,
 Quiet she lies.

Far, far from our delirious dark and light,
 She finds her sleep.
No more the noisy silences of night
 Shall hear her weep.
The wretched tides break over
Her holy breast to cover
 From any eyes.
Till the stark dawn shall drink the latest star,
 So let her be.
O gracious Mother, she has wandered far
 And now comes home to thee.

FROM BERMONDSEY

*O*H, to be free !
To lie for one short hour upon the breast
Of green hospitable fields,
And let the world wheel by !
To feel the kisses of the odoured wind,
To watch the happy heaven alive with song,
To press our faces to the healing grass,
And there sob out our weariness of towns,
And lose our souls in tangles of green shade !

For all our need
Is but to know that still the world is young,
That still the little lanes are loud with joy,
That still the daisy smiles its prayer to God.

LONDON ROSES

*WHEN the young year woos all the world to
flower*

With gold and silver of sun and shower,

The girls troop out with an elfin clamour,

Delicate bundles of lace and light.

And London is laughter and youth and playtime,

Fair as the million-blossomed may-time :

All her ways are afire with glamour,

With dainty damosels pink and white.

The weariest streets new joys discover ;

The sweet glad girl and the lyric lover

Sing their hearts to the moment's flying,

Never a thought to time or tears.

O frivolous frocks ! O fragrant faces,

Scattering blooms in the gloomy places !

Shatter and scatter our sombre sighing,

And lead us back to the golden years !

LONDON JUNE

*R*ANK odours ride on every breeze ;
Skyward a hundred towers loom ;
And factories throb and workshops wheeze,
And children pine in secret gloom.
To squabbling birds the roofs declaim
Their little tale of misery ;
And, smiling over murk and shame,
A wild rose blows by Bermondsey.

Where every traffic-thridden street
Is ribboned o'er with shade and shine,
And webbed with wire and choked with heat ;
Where smokes with fouler smokes entwine :
And where, at evening, darkling lanes
Fume with a sickly ribaldry—
Above the squalors and the pains,
A wild rose blows by Bermondsey.

Somewhere beneath a nest of tiles
My little garret window squats,
Staring across the cruel miles,
And wondering of kindlier spots.
An organ, just across the way,
Sobs out its rag-time melody ;
But in my heart it seems to play :
A Wild Rose blows by Bermondsey !

And dreams of happy morning hills
And woodlands laced with greenest boughs,
Are mine to-day amid the ills
Of Tooley Street and wharfside sloughs.
Though Cherry Gardens reek and roar,
And engines gasp their horrid glee ;
I mark their ugliness no more :
A wild rose blows by Bermondsey.

IN THE TRAIN

*ALONG the leagues of railway line
The year is young with happy flowers.
Lily and rose and clover shine
Along the leagues of railway line ;
And iris, too, and columbine
Delight the twinkling-footed hours.
Along the leagues of railway line
The year is young with happy flowers.*

*But the flower of flowers will meet my train,
Lovelier far than lip can tell !
The wild wheels beat the glad refrain :
But the flower of flowers will meet my train !
Sweet is the child of sun and rain :
The violet or asphodel ;
But the flower of flowers will meet my train,
Lovelier far than lip can tell !*

WEEK-END

*ALL the world's a snatch of song.
Holiday! Holiday!*

*Golden girls and boys as brave,
Brighter than the rainbow wave,
Flash and flutter through the throng.
Holiday! Holiday!*

*O sweet children, laugh at sorrows,
Snap your fingers at to-morrows,
Youth and Love to you belong,
On holiday!*

*Wilding flowers are not more fair.
Holiday! Holiday!*

*Sun and song are yours to-day;
Laugh with April; sing with May;
Live your hour if so you dare.
Holiday! Holiday!*

*Toil and town must follow Sundays,
So, my Saturday-to-Mondays,
Kick your little heels at care,
On holiday, your holiday!*

IN THE LANE

GREEN branches laced a burning sky,
And all the lane was mottled shade,
When she came by.
Her face is with me to this hour.
I think there was no fairer flower
In all the fields that day.

Now Walworth attics hold me high
Above a lane where bawling life
Goes sadly by.
But she has made this Lane for me
A place where I may daily see
Some beauty pass my way ;
Because, in a far-distant lane,
She smiled, and turned to smile again.

EVENING

*FROM The Circus to The Square
There's an avenue of light.
Golden lamps are everywhere
From The Circus to The Square ;
And the rose-winged hours there
Pass like lovely birds in flight.
From The Circus to The Square
There's an avenue of light.*

*London yields herself to men
With the dying of the day.
Let the twilight come, and then
London yields herself to men.
Lords of wealth or slaves of pen,
We, her lovers, all will say :
London yields herself to men
With the dying of the day.*

MUSIC-HALL BALLET

THROUGH the sad billowing haze of grey and
 rose,
Stung with sharp lamps in its most velvet glooms ;
Drowsy with smoke, and loud with voice and glass,
Where wine-whipped animations pass and pass—
Beauty breaks sudden blossoms all around
In happy riot of rhythm, colour, and pose.
The radiant hands, the swift, delighted limbs
Move as in pools of dream the dancer swims,
Holding our bruted sense in fragrance bound.

Lily and clover and the white May-flowers,
And lucid lane afire with honeyed blooms,
And songs that time nor tears can ever fade,
Hold not the grace for which my heart has prayed.
But in this garden of gilt loveliness,
Lapped by the muffled pulse of hectic hours,
Something in me awoke to happiness ;
And through the streets of plunging hoof and horn,
I walked with Beauty to the dim-starred morn.

AT THE PIANO

*C*ANE chairs, a sleek piano, table and bed in a
room

*Lifted happily high from the loud street's
fermentation ;*

*Tobacco and chime of voices wreathing out of the
gloom,*

*Out of the lilied dusk at the firelight's invitation.
Then, in the muffled hour, one, strange and gracious
and sad,*

*Moves from the phantom hearth, and, with infinite
delicacies,*

Looses his lissome hands along the murmurous keys.

Valse, mazurka, and nocturne, prelude and polonaise

*Clamour and wander and wail on the opiate air,
Piercing our hearts with echo of passionate days,*

*Peopling a top front lodging with shapes of care.
And as our souls, uncovered, would shamefully hide
away,*

*The radiant hands light up the enchanted gloom
With the pure flame of life from the shadowless tomb.*

AT CHRISTMAS-TIME

*AT Christmas-time, when frost and rain
Wrought wonders on each window-pane ;
When tea-time came with candle-light
In Childhood's nursery of Delight,
" Goodwill ! " was every day's refrain.*

*Now, in our weariness, we feign
Upon our lips that all is vain.
We smile at Superstition's rite
At Christmas-time.*

*But in the rosy hearth's domain,
Let the old Truths revive and reign.
Let voices, carolling from the night
That Wrong is Wrong and Right still Right,
Lead us to Childhood once again,
At Christmas-time !*

SHOPS

*O*H, London has the bold shops, the silver and
the gold shops,
Rich with all the treasures in the wide world found.
Oh, there you'll find the fairest shops, the cheapest
and the rarest shops,
All ablaze with colour on the pearl-grey ground !

*They deck themselves at daytime with the colours of
the Maytime ;
They deck themselves at twilight with a glad and
lyric glee ;
But oh—the fusty, frowzy shops, those old marine,
Limehousey shops—
Oh, they're the shops that most I love—the only
shops for me !*

THE LAMPLIT HOUR

*D*USK—and the lights of home
Smile through the rain :
A thousand smiles for those that come
Homeward again.

What though the night be drear
With gloom and cold,
So that there be one voice to hear,
One hand to hold ?

Here, by the winter fire,
Life is our own ;
Here, out of murk and mire,
Here is our throne.

Then let the wide world throng
To pomps and powers,
And leave us with the love and song
Of lamplit hours.

AT THE PANTOMIME

I WONDER, will ever I dream them again—
The old, old dreams?

*I wonder, will ever the huntsman come,
To lead his lady tenderly home
From the perilous plain;
And Little Boy Blue—will he come with his horn
Winding gaily across the corn,
Over the seven streams,
The little star-swept streams?*

*I wonder, is Robin Hood dead to-day
In the low-lit greenery?
Or is he for long, long years but hiding,
Waiting the call that shall bring him riding,
Riding out of the grey?
I wonder will ever the dear To-morrow
Lay her light hand on the pulse of Sorrow,
Soothe her and set her free
From sore captivity?*

*O troubled waters! O broken song!
O phantasy vain!
For questing Childhood is lost for ever
In year-locked hills where a foot falls never,
Afar from Right and Wrong.
Then come, little dreams, from the trancèd steep,
With light-winged music above my sleep,
And let me wonder again,
And wander once again.*

ELISE CRAVEN, DANCING

*PEARL is the music-hall and dim,
And many fetid faces swim
Cloudily o'er the gallery's rim,
Little Twinkletoes.*

*And rag-time choruses resound,
For raffish joy is always found
With beer and whisky going round,
Little Twinkletoes.*

*The fauteuils reek of snarling song,
While weary fiddles wail along
The opiate air their ding-dang-dong,
Little Twinkletoes.*

*Back at the bar, one cries : " You lout ! "
And others : " Order ! Throw 'im out ! "
Oh, they are happy, never doubt,
Little Twinkletoes !*

*And then there is a hush of lights.
The music steals by silver flights
Through carnival, moon-haunted nights,
Little Twinkletoes.*

*The haze of lilac looms and shifts.
A sudden bell. The curtain lifts.
And down the darkling stage there drifts
Little Twinkletoes.*

*O fragrant flower of happiness !
O little child, whose light caress
At once can shame and wound and bless,
Little Twinkletoes !*

*Though Love and Beauty pass us by,
Yet in our hearts a smothered cry
Awakes for what can never die,
Little Twinkletoes.*

*We are so wistful for our home.
Warm windows fleck the long grey gloam,
But silently, nor bid us come,*

Little Twinkletoes.

*Sick with the tumult and the wine,
Like poor lost birds we pine and pine,
Beating at every sheltered shrine,*

Little Twinkletoes.

*The curtain falls on April joys,
And leering ladies harshly noise
The loves of splendid girls and boys,*

Little Twinkletoes.

*And you—you cannot understand
How, for a moment, your soft hand
Has led us back to fairyland,*

Little Twinkletoes !

OUTER SUBURBIA

WHERE London sprawls across the gentle
fields,

*In those far fringes where the green begins—
Eltham and Enfield, Southall and Wanstead Flat—
The landscape but a loveless prospect yields :
Wan grass, the last week's washing, a dead cat,
Factories, maisonettes, and sardine-tins.*

*Yet even here the honeysuckle blows,
And the shy nightingale enchants the gloom ;
And sometimes I have seen the wayside rose
Kissing the hawthorn bough by Barking Fair.
And when the evening flowers with lights of home,
Each window seems a little silent prayer.*

GROWING UP

*F*AIR flakes of wilding rose
Entwine for Seventeen,
With lovely leaves of violet
That dares not live till fields forget
The grey that drest their green with snows,
And grow from grey to green !

*And when the wreath is twining,
Oh, prithee, have a care !
Weave in no bloom of subtle smell ;
The simple ones she loves too well.
Let violets on her neck lie shining,
Wild rose in her hair.*

*And bring her rose-winged fancies,
From shadowy shoals of dream,
To clothe her in this wistful hour,
When girlhood steals from bud to flower.
Bring her the tunes of elfin dances,
Bring her the faery Gleam !*

*At the world's gate she stands,
Silent and very still ;
And lone as that one star that lights
The delicate dusk of April nights.
Oh, let love bind her holy hands,
And fetter her from ill !*

*Her tumbled tresses cling
Adown her like a veil,
And cheek and curls as sweetly chime
As verses with a rounding rhyme.
Surely there is not anything
So valiant and so frail.*

*In faith and without fear,
She brings to a rude throng
At war with beauty and with truth,
The wonder of her blossomy youth.
And faith shall wither to a sneer,
And sneers shall silence song.*

*Her soul is a soft flame,
Set in a world of grey.
Help her, O Life, to keep its shrine
That her white window's vigilant sign
May pierce the tangled mists of shame,
Where we have lost our way !*

*So linger at this day,
My little maid serene !
Or, since the dancing feet must go,
Take Childhood with you still, and so,
Live in a year-worn world, but stay
For ever Seventeen !*

POOR

*FROM jail he sought her, and he found
A darkened house, a darkened street,
A shrilly sky that screamed of sleet,
And from The Lane quick gusts of sound.*

*He mocked at life that men call sweet.
He went and wiped it out in beer—
“ Well, dammit, why should I stick here,
By a dark house in a dark street ? ”*

*For he and his but serve defeat.
For kings they gather gems and gold,
And life for them, when all is told,
Is a dark house in a dark street.*

PRISON

*ALL the changing loveliness that tires the face of
London,*

*All the pasture pageant of honey-breathing boughs,
All the gentle pomp that marches with the seasons—
Have no part in him, save to thorn his wretched
brows.*

*Young Spring whispers in the hedges and the high-
ways ;*

*Lusty Summer sings along the shadow-fretted green ;
Low-toned Autumn holds finger-tips to Winter.
Only for him the dead, unchanging scene.*

Only for him the death in life unending.

Only for him a world of four dead walls.

Even the hovels are marshalled in the pageant—

*Over Hoxton arches the laburnum falls ;
Lilac leans laughing over Bethnal Green and Shore-
ditch,*

*Slum-locked cottages adorn their grey.
Only for him the blossomless November ;
Only for him the unchanging, sunless day.*

*The gruff bricks leap high and higher from the tur-
moil—*

*Swart-tipped waves that surge along the London
night—*

*These, even these, catch the colour of the seasons,
Even their dolours are touched about with light.*

*Small birds twitter at the chimney-stacks of Walworth,
Small birds whistle in the yellow-tressed trees,
Sleek dogs lie with their bellies over plenty.*

*But Law and Order hold him : and he is less than
these.*

*Wash him with his tears when the daffodil awakens ;
Bathe him in his blood when the June stars ring ;*

*Break him on the wheel when the Clapham furze is
yellow ;*

*Burden him with shackles when the red leaves sing.
Burn his flesh with discipline, tear his heart with
routine ;*

*Then, cool his agonies with oil of spikenard ;
Cherish him and nourish him; then heat again the
irons.*

God in His highest wrath shall never smite so hard.

For fifteen years we will hold him in our torment ;

Passionlessly break him by rite and rule of thumb.

For fifteen years we will bind his heart in system,

For fifteen years we will hold him deaf and dumb.

For fifteen years at the pallid shrine of Justice,

Scarce will he hear the world's muffled footsteps flow ;

For fifteen years we will suck his soul of valour ;

Then, if he be tranquil, we will loose and let him go.

*Then, exceeding mercy, we will spit him back to
freedom ;*

*Bloodless and useless, we will spit him from our jaw,
Vacant of purpose, and numb to life and living :*

Such the meed of any who slight our precious law.

Poor caged birds that, wingless and bewildered,

Break from their bars and hear a strange world call,

Flutter to the sunset, and die in darkling secret.

God marks the sparrows ; will He mark his fall ?

*All the changing loveliness that tires the face of
London,*

All the pasture pageant of honey-breathing boughs,

All the gentle pomp that marches with the seasons

*Have no part in him, save to thorn his wretched
brows.*

Young Spring rustles in the hedges and the highways ;

*Golden-tasselled Summer from the merry meadow
calls ;*

Low-toned Autumn and fierce Winter find him

Knee to knee with Death behind the four dead walls.

CHILDHOOD

*WHEN we were small, and much alone,
We lived in castles all our own,
Fashioned of toys and pantomime,
Of picture-books and nursery rhyme ;
And often dreamed that we were grown.*

*Alas ! The noisy years are flown,
And all our wonderings are gone,
And now our dreams are of the time
When we were small.*

*Yet, sister, though our lives be thrown
In ways that lead to fret and moan ;
Though we are weary with the climb,
And dusty with the glare and grime,
Our hearts still shine as then they shone—
When we were small !*

MIDWINTER

*N*OW fades the green and grows the grey
On sky and tree and winding way.
Now fruitful fields lie slumber-bound,
And lifeless leaves rain all around.

*Now leap the fires in hut and hall,
And shadow-fairies climb the wall.
Now hall and hut fling golden light
To beat the bare December night.*

*But gloom and chilly rain and snow
Hold not our hearts; we do but know
A deeper gladness in the day
When grows the green and fades the grey.*

VIGIL

*L*ONELY I stand
Here in the rainy dark,
Where a warm window breaks the night
With melody and gracious light.

Vigil I keep
Until the young birds cry,
And on grey hills the green and golden
Footprints of the morning lie.

My dust and rags
I carry with a will ;
Though sunken in the darkling mire,
My heart is singing still.

And through long hours
Her face before me swims—
A window breaking through the night
With melody and gracious light.

SONG

*I LOVE a lady of high degree,
Who once in passing smiled on me.
She is more beautiful than stars
Lighting an unknown sea.*

*I have not heard her voice ; its sound
I think should hold my senses bound,
As sweet tunes swimming through the night
From an enchanted ground.*

*When I with toil am sick for sleep,
Through wakeful hours such thoughts I keep
Upon this lady, that I lie
In pleasant pain and weep.*

*Oh, if my lonely dream could be,
And bring my beautiful to me—
Oh, then I'd laugh at Life and Death
In Love's Eternity !*

SUPPLICATION

*G*IVE me one hour of love, one little hour,
While yet we have the day!
All that I have I bring—
Truth and a heart of Spring.
Give me one hour of love,
Princess, I pray!

Give me one hour, lest, when the day be done,
Thy heart shall hear the call,
And in thy pleased round
True love shall not be found.
Give me one hour, Princess,
Ere night befall!

THE PRODIGAL

*AFTER many years,
I have come home again,
Through a lone land of tears,
By many a noisome den.
Along the twilit lane a casement shows
A lamp set out for me.
O Love and Beauty! After many years
I have come home to thee.*

*Yea, after many years
In the loud wilderness,
Shaken with shames and fears,
I come now to confess.
And only Love, that casteth out all sin,
Hath known me and smiled,
Because Love, blotting out the wan, waste years,
Sees but a little child.*

BEYOND LONDON

*I*N Kentish lanes in blossom-time,
The air is loud with bird and bee.
Amid the spray of orchard foam—
Of apple, lilac, plum, and cherry—
Whose colours like a sweet tune chime,
The little voice of Spring makes merry.

*O sun, shine kindly over Kent !
O wind, blow softly from the sea !
And bring, with gracious sacrament,
Ripe fruit to every flowered tree.*

*O wind and sun, blow over me !
Cleanse me of malice, set me free
From hate, and lead me humbly home.
Ripen my soul, that I may be
A goodlier thing for men to see !*

FIRST LOVE

*O MOTHER, I have heard a lady
Singing in the night.
I peeped where the lucid moon disclosed her,
Lovely and brave and bright.
Her face was shining, shining, mother,
With a wild sea's light.*

*The silver flowers of the night ring out
The name I call her by ;
Her smiles float in the very dusts
That on my footsteps fly.
And the haunting song that tranced mine ears
The sweet birds cry.*

*O mother, my heart is filled with wonder,
Spun about with fear ;
For her voice, above the clamour of living,
Climbs and carols clear.
And I know there is never a rest for me
Till I have held my dear.*

NIGHT-PIECE

*ALL the night long I lie in my lonely room,
Where the muffled hours, like prisoners, creep
to doom ;
And Silence, the velvet-voiced, sings me your name ;
Your pitiful eyes are alight with an altar-flame,
And your pearl-pale hands reach out of the timid
gloom,
And all my heart is a temple of wonder and shame.*

*Ah, torturing fancy—but will it be even so
When I hold the grace of you, never to let you go ?
Will my heart be awed of you still, and your fire-lit
chair a throne ?
And I the man I am made by the touch of your hand
alone ?
Will you still, when won, make holy the wan, waste
places ?
Or is the winning of Love but the losing of Love's high
graces ?*

A POSTSCRIPT

YES, I have scribbled a deal of verse,
Mostly in haste, and to feed my purse
With a graceful guinea or so ;
And critical friends of mine allow
I could write like Milton, if I knew how—
Not a difficult thing to know.

If you wonder—Why do I toy with rhyme ?
The answer is : that to beg is crime,
And to dig I am quite unable.
So I gather the guineas, and buy with these
Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese,
And flowers to light my table.

Hence do I turn—not over well—
Rondeau, triolet, villanelle,
Parody, jape, or sonnet,
And those who skim in sedate reviews
A vagrom lyric of dawns and dews,
Mark not the tears upon it.

To them it is merely a chansonette,
A “ fill ” for a column under-set,
A weed in a lucid lane.
They do not know, they do not care,
That every line is a passionate prayer
Wrung from the lips of pain.

But with all my chirping of Love and the Spring
There is one little song that I never may sing
For a guinea or even two ;
Not though I labour deep and long ;
For, dear, it is that one silent song
That speaks my heart to you !

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